

BURTON'S CHAPEL CELEBRATES 114 YEARS

By Megan Trotter
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ALGOOD – This Sunday, Burton's Chapel United Methodist Church celebrates 114 years of existence, and members are taking the opportunity to honor one of the founders, James Burton, who donated the land where the church rests.



Burton was an African American man and a slave on the White Plains plantation in Algood. In the case of most slaves in Putnam County, historians have found it difficult to find many details about their lives aside from notes of sale, however bits and pieces of Burton's life have come together to form an incomplete, but

interesting, story.

(Preparing to honor one of the founders of Burton's United Methodist Church are, from left, Morris Irby of Wright's Chapel; Edith Tubbs, Burton's Chapel church historian; Rev. Robert Utley, pastor of Burton's and Wright's; and Mattie Darty and Emma Roberts, both Burton's members).

"From records, we know that he was the first black man in Putnam County to serve in the Civil War," Robert Utley, pastor of Burton's Chapel, said.

He was born in June 1838, and is possibly the "Jim" mentioned in a will written by Ann Hawes Quarles in 1829. The will also mentions an African American woman with a child named Margaret – possibly the Margaret that Burton would later go on to marry in 1846. Since that possible reference in 1829, nothing else has been found about Burton until in 1864, when he enlisted with the Army to serve during the Civil War.

"What we have figured out, is we think there were some troops that were stationed here," Utley said. "Mr. Burton was an exceptional cook, and we think that he was cooking for these troops and the persuaded him to enlist."

He served under the command of Captain Harrison in the Company E 9th Regiment of the United States Colored Troop Heavy Artillery, and later transferred to other units. A

report from 1866 lists him as being discharged by Maj. Gen. Stoneman because of a disability he received in service.

When he returned, he was a free an thanks to the 13th Amendment, which abolished slavery. He came back to Algood and purchased a great deal of property.

“We don’t know how much land he purchased, but we are under the assumption that he was one of the first blacks to be able to purchase land and become an entrepreneur basically, because he farmed his land, then he eventually ended up selling a lot of the land, and he of course donated the property where Burton’s Chapel currently stands today,” Utley said.

Burton and his wife, Margaret, whom he married in 1846, had 12 children together. The family donated the land where the Burton’s Chapel Untied Methodist Church now stands, and the original church was built with lumber cut from the trees on the land.

Except for a few notes of property sales, no further history is currently known about Burton, except that his death likely occurred in 1903, as his wife started receiving a widow’s pension in 1904. However, his family legacy continued. One of his daughters was the mother of James Robert Burgess Sr., who was responsible for getting the funds to help build Darwin High School, the school for African Americans in Putnam County. Burgess’ son, James Robert Burgess Jr., went on to serve in the army as a platoon leader and company commander under Gen. George Patton during the Battle of the Bulge, and later went to law school and became the state attorney in Illinois.

The church will be celebrating Burton’s life with a special service starring at 9:45 a.m., that will include the presentation of proclamations from the county and the state, an honor guard presentation, preaching by one of Burton’s descendents, James Darty of Indiana, and a fellowship lunch to follow.

“It’s interesting to me, because I love history,” said Edith Tubbs, a church member who is compiling the church’s history. “For somebody from Algood, Tennessee, a little small town, to serve in the Civil War, and he’s someone our church was named after – it just blows my mind.”

*See James R. Burgess Jr. Family in the History section for Putnam Co., TN at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>

*Read more about the History of Putnam Co., TN & surrounding areas at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>